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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 VATICAN 000806

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DEPT FOR EUR/WE MENNUTI, EUR/UBI-HERNANDEZ, NEA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/24/2013

TAGS: [PREL](#) [UK](#) [UK](#) [VT](#) [VTPREL](#)

SUBJECT: POPE AND BLAIR AGREE ON CENTRALITY OF UN ROLE,
NEED TO AVOID NEW DIVISIONS

REF: A. A) VATICAN 683

[B](#). B) VATICAN 641

[C](#). C) ROME 763

CLASSIFIED BY: DEPUTY CHIEF OF MISSION D. BRENT HARDT, REASONS: 1.5 (B
) AND (D).

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SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) DURING A FEBRUARY 22 PRIVATE AUDIENCE WITH THE POPE AND SUBSEQUENT MEETING WITH VATICAN SECRETARY OF STATE SODANO, UK PRIME MINISTER BLAIR OUTLINED TO THE HOLY SEE HIS VIEWS ON THE NEED FOR THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY TO DISARM SADDAM HUSSEIN. THE POPE AND HIS SENIOR ADVISORS REPORTEDLY CONVEYED THEIR VIEW THAT DISARMAMENT CAN BE ACHIEVED WITHOUT RECOURSE TO MILITARY ACTION. BOTH SIDES AGREED ON THE CENTRALITY OF THE UN'S ROLE, THE IMPORTANCE OF RESOLVING THE ISSUE OF IRAQ'S POSSESSION OF WMD, AND THE NEED TO ENSURE THAT THIS ISSUE DOES NOT LEAD TO NEW DIVISIONS IN THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY. END SUMMARY.

PRIVATE MEETING TURNED PUBLIC

[1](#)2. (C) PRIME MINISTER TONY BLAIR MEET WITH THE POPE FOR A HALF HOUR IN A PRIVATE AUDIENCE FEBRUARY 22, FOLLOWED BY AN HOUR-LONG MEETING WITH VATICAN SECRETARY OF STATE SODANO AND FOREIGN MINISTER TAURAN. BLAIR'S PRIVATE MEETING WITH THE POPE WAS NOT ORIGINALLY INTENDED TO BE SEEN AS A POLITICAL MEETING, BUT RATHER A PRIVATE FAMILY VISIT. (BLAIR'S WIFE AND CHILDREN ARE CATHOLIC, AND HAD WANTED TO MEET THE POPE.) THE TIMING WAS DETERMINED NOT BY THE PRESSURE OVER IRAQ, BUT BY THE COINCIDENCE OF A PREVIOUSLY SCHEDULED MEETING IN ROME WITH ITALIAN PM BERLUSCONI (REF C) AND THE BLAIR CHILDREN'S SCHOOL HOLIDAYS. UK AMBASSADOR COLVIN (PROTECT) SAID THE UK
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AND HOLY SEE HAD AGREED THE BLAIR-POPE MEETING WOULD BE PRIVATE WITHOUT THE CUSTOMARY POST-MEETING PRESS RELEASE. THE HOLY SEE DID NOT HONOR THIS, HOWEVER, AS PAPAL SPOKESMAN NAVARRO-VALLS PROVIDED THE PRESS WITH A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE KEY POINTS OF THE TWO MEETINGS WITH "THE VATICAN'S SPIN."

IRAQ: AVOID DIVISIONS; KEEP FOCUS ON UN

[1](#)3. (C) ACCORDING TO THE VATICAN PRESS SUMMARY AND THE UK AMBASSADOR, WHO PARTICIPATED IN THE SECOND MEETING, BUT NOT THE PAPAL AUDIENCE, THE THREE AGREED SUBJECTS WERE IRAQ, THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT, AND THE EU CONSTITUTION. ON IRAQ, THE AMBASSADOR SAID PM BLAIR LAID OUT HIS VIEWS -- WHICH SHE SAID WOULD BE VERY FAMILIAR TO OUR EMBASSY IN LONDON -- ON THE NEED TO DISARM SADDAM AND TO ENSURE THE UN MET ITS RESPONSIBILITIES. THE POPE AND HIS COLLABORATORS IN TURN OUTLINED THE HOLY SEE'S VIEW THAT "ALL INTERESTED PARTIES IN THE IRAQI CRISIS NEED TO COLLABORATE WITH THE ORGANIZATION OF THE UN AND KNOW HOW TO USE THE RESOURCES OFFERED BY INTERNATIONAL LAW IN ORDER TO AVERT THE TRAGEDY OF WAR," WHICH THE HOLY SEE CONTINUES TO BELIEVE IS AVOIDABLE. BOTH SIDES AGREED THAT THE UN ROLE SHOULD BE CENTRAL, BUT DIFFERED OVER THE POTENTIAL NEED FOR RECOURSE TO FORCE IF SADDAM FAILED TO COMPLY. THE HOLY SEE ALSO EMPHASIZED TO BLAIR ITS STANDARD VIEW THAT "SPECIAL CONSIDERATION" BE GIVEN TO THE HUMANITARIAN SITUATION OF THE IRAQI PEOPLE, "ALREADY SO SEVERELY TRIED BY THE LONG YEARS OF EMBARGO."

[1](#)4. (C) WHAT WAS NEW IN THE HOLY SEE'S PUBLIC PRESENTATION OF
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THE ISSUE FOLLOWING THE MEETINGS WITH BLAIR WAS ITS CLEAR RECOGNITION OF THE SERIOUSNESS OF THE SITUATION IN IRAQ -- WHICH WE HAVE HEARD PRIVATELY, BUT HAS BEEN MORE MUTED IN THE VATICAN'S PUBLIC TREATMENT OF IRAQ. THIS WAS ALSO REFLECTED IN THE HOLY SEE UN PERMREP'S PRESENTATION BEFORE THE SECURITY

COUNCIL IN WHICH HE OBSERVED THAT THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY IS "RIGHTLY WORRIED AND ADDRESSING A JUST AND URGENT CAUSE" IN DISARMING ARSENALS OF MASS DESTRUCTION. THE SECOND NEW ELEMENT WAS THE CONCERN EXPRESSED BY THE HOLY SEE ABOUT ENSURING THAT IN DEALING WITH THE IRAQ CRISIS, "EVERY EFFORT BE MADE TO AVOID NEW DIVISIONS IN THE WORLD." THIS REFLECTS THE VATICAN'S CONCERN BOTH FOR POTENTIAL DIVISIONS BETWEEN THE MUSLIM AND CHRISTIAN WORLDS, AS WELL AS DIVISIONS WITHIN THE WEST ITSELF.

NEED TO MOVE AHEAD ON ISRAEL-PALESTINE

15. (C) ON ISRAEL AND PALESTINE, THE UK AMBASSADOR CONFIRMED

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ACTION EUR-00

INFO	LOG-00	NP-00	CIAE-00	USNW-00	DODE-00	DS-00	EAP-00
	VC-00	TEDE-00	INR-00	IO-00	VCE-00	NEA-00	DCP-01
	NSAE-00	OIC-02	PM-00	IRM-00	SSO-00	SS-00	PMB-00
	DSCC-00	PRM-00	SAS-00	/003W			
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FM AMEMBASSY VATICAN
TO AMEMBASSY LONDON IMMEDIATE
SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE
INFO ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY

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THAT BOTH SIDES WERE IN AGREEMENT THAT MUCH MORE NEEDED TO BE DONE TO RESOLVE THE CURRENT SITUATION AND RESTORE MOVEMENT TOWARD PEACE. BOTH AGREED THAT THE ABSENCE OF SUCH PROGRESS WOULD COMPLICATE EFFORTS TO ADDRESS ALL OTHER PROBLEMS IN THE REGION, INCLUDING IRAQ. BOTH ALSO AGREED THAT INTENSIFIED EFFORTS TO SOLVE THE PROBLEMS OF INJUSTICE AND POVERTY IN PALESTINE WOULD CONTRIBUTE TO THE BROADER EFFORT TO MINIMIZE
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NEW TERRORIST THREATS.

THE CHURCH IN THE EU CONSTITUTION

16. (C) REGARDING THE EU CONSTITUTION -- AN ISSUE THE POPE RAISES WITH ALL EU MEMBERS AND PROSPECTIVE MEMBERS -- THE POPE REITERATED HIS STRONG DESIRE THAT EXPLICIT RECOGNITION BE GIVEN IN THE CONSTITUTION TO CHURCHES AND COMMUNITIES OF BELIEVERS, AND THAT THE EU MAKE AN EXPLICIT COMMITMENT TO MAINTAIN A STRUCTURED DIALOGUE WITH CHURCHES.

COMMENT: VATICAN STEPPING UP THE DIPLOMATIC PACE

17. (C) DESPITE THE PRIVATE ORIGINS AND NATURE OF THE VISIT, THE MEDIA HAS SEIZED ON THE VISIT -- WITH ENCOURAGEMENT FROM THE HOLY SEE -- AS A REFLECTION OF THE POPE'S CONTINUING CENTRAL ROLE AS A SOURCE OF MORAL INFLUENCE ON THE CURRENT INTERNATIONAL DEBATE OVER IRAQI DISARMAMENT. BLAIR'S VISIT FOLLOWED CLOSE ON THE HEELS OF PAPAL AUDIENCES WITH KOFI ANNAN, TARIQ AZIZ (REF B), AND JOSCHKA FISCHER, AS WELL AS CARDINAL ETCHEGARAY'S MEETING WITH SADDAM (REF A), AND IT PRECEDES VISITS THIS WEEK OF SPANISH PRIME MINISTER AZNAR AND IRAN'S PARLIAMENTARY SPEAKER MOHAMMED REZA KHATAMI. THE POPE'S TOP OFFICIALS ALSO CLOSETED WITH ITALIAN PRESIDENT CIAMPI AND PM BERLUSCONI FEBRUARY 17 IN AN ANNUAL MEETING IN WHICH IRAQ WAS A MAIN TOPIC OF CONVERSATION. AS THEY HAVE POINTED OUT TO US, (REFS A AND B), THE VATICAN ACKNOWLEDGES
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THE RIGHTNESS OF OUR CAUSE IN DEALING WITH SADDAM'S WMD AND ACKNOWLEDGES THEIR DANGER, BUT CANNOT YET BRING ITSELF TO ACCEPT THAT RESORT TO FORCE IS THE ONLY WAY FORWARD. THIS REFLECTS BOTH A WIDELY ACCEPTED VIEW WITHIN SOME CHURCH CIRCLES THAT WAR IS AN IMMORAL AND INEFFECTIVE MEANS TO

RESOLVE INTERNATIONAL PROBLEMS, AND MORE PRAGMATIC CONCERNS FOR THE IMPACT OF WAR ON CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM RELATIONS IN GENERAL AND ON CATHOLIC POPULATIONS IN MUSLIM COUNTRIES IN PARTICULAR.

18. (C) IN PURSUING ITS ACTIVIST DIPLOMATIC AGENDA, THE VATICAN IS SEEKING TO USE THE FULL FORCE OF ITS MORAL MEGAPHONE TO ADVANCE ITS VIEW THAT IRAQ'S THREATS CAN BE ADDRESSED SHORT OF WAR. BLAIR'S MEETING AND THAT OF AZNAR FEBRUARY 27 WILL HELP TO EMPHASIZE THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE HOLY SEE SHARES OUR CONCERNS ABOUT THE THREAT POSED BY SADDAM, WHILE ALSO MAKING CLEAR THE NEED FOR THE UN TO MEET ITS RESPONSIBILITIES. IN THE WAKE OF THIS HIGH-LEVEL DIPLOMATIC ACTIVITY, WE HAVE NOTED INCREASING CONCERNS BEING EXPRESSED ABOUT THE U.S. "NEGLECTING" OR "UNDERVALUING" THE MORAL INFLUENCE OF THE POPE. WE CONTINUE TO BELIEVE THAT A SENIOR LEVEL MEETING WITH THE HOLY SEE WOULD ALLOW US TO OVERCOME THE WIDESPREAD MEDIA IMAGE OF THE U.S. AND HOLY SEE AT ODDS OVER IRAQ BY EMPHASIZING OUR SHARED CONCERN OVER SADDAM'S POSSESSION OF WMD, OUR SHARED COMMITMENT TO WORKING WITH AND SUPPORTING THE UN, AND OUR SHARED CONCERN FOR THE IRAQI PEOPLE.

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